

Interview with Durward “Rocky” Jellison
[at AMHI 35 times in 18 years]

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Interviewer: Karen Evans

KE: I want to first talk to you about some of your experiences at AMHI. I want to start out by asking why did you go to AMHI?

RJ: I was really depressed and hearing voices.

KE: When you think about AMHI, what kind of memories come back? What comes to mind—what kind of remembrances?

RJ: Memories? Threw me out on the street when I didn't have a place to live.

KE: What other memories do you have of AMHI?

RJ: The other thing is they put you in seclusion—put you in the COR room and they wouldn't let you out and when you're feeling safe.

KE: What did COR stand for?

RJ: It's like a one-on-one person and you can't get out of the unit, even though you feel safe and stuff. Not ready to go out of the hospital yet. Stuff like that, and they automatically want you to go on and off right away even though you feel safe to go outside out of the hospital. I want to be on the unit. Not locked. You know, I am claustrophobic. I want to be with other people.

KE: What was the room like? I mean did you wear clothes in the room?

RJ: Pajamas.

KE: You wore pajamas. Any other memories that come to mind?

RJ: Just having to stay in the room. They put you in seclusion.

KE: What was it like to be in seclusion?

RJ: It was like nobody would come and talk to you or nothing like that for hours and stuff like that, and somebody would do 15 minute checks. That's how they would do it. Sometimes they wouldn't let you go the bathroom and you would have to pee on the floor.

KE: That sounds kind of downgrading. Was it?

RJ: Yeah, and you had to clean your own mess up before you got out.

KE: Oh, you're kidding?

RJ: I have done it before.

KE: Wow, how long were you there at AMHI?

RJ: Sometimes for 6 months, and sometimes a week.

KE: How many times were you there? Can you remember?

RJ: I have been there about 35 times.

KE: Wow, 35 times?

RJ: 35 times out of 18 years.

KE: Out of 18 years you have been there 35 times?

RJ: ...We had to go through the Sheriff's Department a lot and stuff like that, you know and sometimes we had to be shackled and stuff. AMHI before they had emergency rooms and stuff.

KE: Of the different times you were there over time, did it get better or did it get worse?

RJ: ...I was the same way as when I got out...

KE: It didn't improve over time?

RJ: No.

KE: What was a day in the life at AMHI for you? How did you start your day? What kind of things did you do during the day?

RJ: You mean when I got out?

KE: No. What was your life like while you were at AMHI? How early did you get up? What was your routine?

RJ: I stayed in bed most of the time. Yeah, I stayed in bed a lot, slept, because I was medicated because I was hyperactive and I had to deal with hyperactive state, and stuff. I was tired most of the time. They gave me ... to slow me down. They didn't have time to talk to you and they would tell you to get away from the desk and didn't want to talk to you when you wanted to talk.

KE: Was there anyone there that affected you in a positive way?

RJ: Norman Wysocki was the best person there...He was a nice guy. He was very nice.

KE: Was he staff or patient?

RJ: He was a staff person. He was very nice. He helped me out a lot...He got me out of COR room and stuff when he was there and he trusted me a lot, and he said I trust you.

KE: Good. That is always good to have a friend. Sounds like you felt real fondness for him. Was there someone that you felt negative about while you were at AMHI?

RJ: I did—I felt negative about most of the staff there...All the nurses and stuff. They weren't understanding, you know. Here I am coming down to the hospital and they wouldn't help me and coming back in. In and out, in and out. I want to leave right away because they wouldn't help me and I would come in right away because they weren't helping either with leaving.

KE: So who helped you the most? Was it this one person that you were mentioning?

RJ: Yeah.

KE: I am glad you had him while you were there? Can you talk a little bit about what the relationships were between patient-to-patient and staff-to-patient and staff-to-staff?

RJ: So many patients in there it is hard to have time to talk about them.

KE: Overall did they have a sense of community, or did everybody kind of isolate and do their own thing?

RJ: Yeah, they watched TV when they can. Stuff and watch TV and stuff. Lots of people just sat around, you know in the day room and stuff.

KE: What kind of treatment did you have while you were at AMHI?

RJ: Treatment?

KE: Were you on meds?

RJ: I was on medication.

KE: Did you meet with a psychiatrist?

RJ: A psychiatrist, yeah. I met with a psychiatrist and I talked to Dr. Arnez who was really good to me. He was the best talker of all. He was really kind and he always got me out. A lot of times they didn't want me to have Dr Arnez when I was there because they knew it was because I wanted to get out of COR so they would get another doctor on another team.

KE: Were you part of your treatment plan?

RJ: Heh?

KE: Did you have a treatment plan while you were there?

RJ: Yeah I did. I'd have to go to the room and stuff so I made my own treatment plan. I got out a lot. I got off the unit.

KE: Oh well that's good. What kind of activities did they have while you were up there?

RJ: Had like gym and they had what was like behavior modification or something and sometimes they had that, and they had –

KE: Did they have any sports like basketball? I know you are a basketball [fan].

RJ: They had basketball there.

KE: Swimming?

RJ: Swimming sometimes, and also they had art. They had people volunteering and card games and stuff like that.

KE: How did staying at AMHI affect your family? Did your family come visit you?

RJ: My family is far away in Connecticut.

KE: How about friends? Were they able to come up and see you?

RJ: No.

KE: No? So you felt kind of isolated?

RJ: Yeah.

KE: That's too bad. Do you have any thing else that you would like to say about AMHI before we go to the next part of our questions?

RJ: I just don't – no.

KE: What I would like to talk about next is where you are today and what is happening in your life today. So I want to start out by asking how you are doing?

RJ: I am doing great! I am working.

KE: How is it? You're working!! Rocky, that is exciting. So how long have you been working?

RJ: I have been working since May and I am 3 years sober. I never had that in my life.

KE: Congratulations.

RJ: 3 years and sober. I was in the bottle. That's why my depression got bad. I was always into drugs for a lot of years—33 years. Never got sober, never got drug free. I was always in the bottle. Now I'm working at Maine Way Irving Gas Station.

KE: What do you do? Do you pump gas?

RJ: No I clean the yard. I clean the pumps and I do the garbage and also I sometimes stack Pepsi, soda, and the beer and everything else.

KE: Very good for you. I am pleased. In what way are you connected with your family today, or are you?

RJ: I am connected. I see them 3 times a year. I was down there August 26th and I just got back September 8th.

KE: That's great Rocky. How are you connected with your friends?

RJ: Friends—don't have anybody right now since Bill left. Bill left me when he went with his fiancé. So...I don't have nobody, but I have a girlfriend here.

KE: Have you experienced discrimination or stigma since you dealt with mental illness?

RJ: I've worked before.

KE: Have you experienced discrimination? Have people treated your prejudicially?

RJ: No.

KE: Within the mental health field right now we use the word recovery a lot. What does recovery mean to you?

RJ: What I am doing right now.

KE: Working?

RJ: Yeah, drug free, alcohol free, you know and I haven't been in the hospital for almost a year—since March.

KE: That is great, Rocky.

RJ: I have never had that before.

KE: What is the most important thing in your recovery process?

RJ: Pleasure of...comfortable and stuff.

KE: Has spirituality played a role in your recovery?

RJ: Spirituality, what do you mean?

KE: Religion.

RJ: Hmm, I touch my coin every day. If that's some kind of prayer. I mean to keep me sober.

KE: What has been the biggest challenge for you to overcome?

RJ: Starring. My nurse says – PTSD. I still have PTSD problems—starring. I asked my doctor and my doctor said it's probably because you're not having any drugs or alcohol [for] your PTSD. I have a little problem with that, but it's getting better.

KE: That's great. How have your hopes and goals changed since you left AMHI?

RJ: I have been doing okay, since I came here. I was not really doing well when I didn't come here. It's been 4 years and I have been doing really well.

KE: So your goals have been to get to a place like this and the therapy that they have here and all that stuff?

RJ: Yeah.

KE: In Augusta we are replacing AMHI with the new Riverview Psychiatric Center. Have you heard that?

RJ: No.

KE: We are building a new hospital to replace AMHI...

RJ: What I would like to see there—they don't have it here but they have in Connecticut. It should be therapeutic environment. You shouldn't be locked on the unit...People should be getting out more and there shouldn't be a lock on the unit. I would like to see that happen, because it does help people in Connecticut. A lot of changes being on the unit and stuff. I think a lot of times when people on the unit and stay on the unit a lot, it is the same thing they came in for—depression and stuff.

KE: That's good because that's what they are doing. They are having the mall which takes people off the unit and puts them in the mall environment during the day, so you would be pleased to know that something that you are hoping was going to happen is happening right now. Is there any other advice you would like to give Riverview Psychiatric Center?

RJ: Yeah...people are people, loving and care, you know...

KE: I want to thank you so much for this interview. I really appreciate it.

RJ: You're welcome.